

4 Resolutions to Help You Read the Bible

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 February 2009

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] We're talking about J.C. Ryle's practical religion. Last week we talked about four reasons why we should love our Bibles. Does anyone remember those four reasons or one of those four reasons? It's God breathed. That was the first one. We should love our Bibles because it's God breathed. It comes from God. It tells us how we can be forgiven. Everyone here has a sin problem. We have a problem with God or God more like it has a problem with God.

It's God with us. And this tells us how we can be forgiven of our sins. There's two more. It's full of sanctifying truth. The Word of God is full of truth that can make us holy. And we need to be holy if we're going to see the Lord. And so we should love our Bibles.

And the fourth one was kind of in there but maybe not as clear was the Bible is full of blessed truth. It's full of truth that can make us wise in how we live. And it can make us wise in how we seek our joy. It helps us to live God glorifying meaningful lives.

And so that's why we are Bible people at this church and why this church is a Bible centered church because the Word of God is the power of God unto salvation.

And the Word of God is able to save us and to make us holy. It's full of saving grace. And God sends down His saving grace and not like the rain just sort of indiscriminate falling everywhere.

[1:46] He pours it down through giant aquifers through giant pipes. And one of the largest pipes that we have is the Word of God. And so God sends us His truth and saving grace through His Word.

And so if we want grace, if we need grace, we need to read the Bible. We need to stand at the end of this aquifer and drink deeply.

So if the Bible is worth reading, it's worth reading well. And that's what we're going to be talking about today. How to read the Bible well.

How do we read the Bible well? That's the question. And we're going to answer that question by making four resolutions. Four resolutions before we read.

You're all familiar with the idea of a resolution. We just came into a new year and it's traditional, as everyone knows, that you say, I'm going to resolve to do certain things.

[2:50] And by this time, you've already forgotten them. But remember, you made those resolutions and you said, I'm going to change in this area. So we're going to make four resolutions today on how to read the Bible better.

And so the goal is that if we make these resolutions, we're actually going to read the Bible well. And it might change the way we read the Bible. And if it does, that's good.

If it helps us to read the Bible well. The first resolution is this. We resolve to read the Bible regularly. Read the Bible regularly.

God's word is powerful. God's word can save us if we obey it and believe it. It's able to give us wisdom and joy. It's able to help us in our deepest sorrows.

When we are at our absolute wits end and we don't know what to do, if we hold to the word of God and the promises that we find there, we can find great comfort.

[3:58] But the Bible is absolutely powerless if it sits on our nightstand and the cover remains closed. It's sharper than any two-edged sword.

But if we leave our sword in the sheath and never take it out, then it will do us no good. And so that's why we say our first resolution is that we have to read the Bible regularly.

So let me ask you, what does it mean to read the Bible regularly? That's pretty simple, I think. Do it. Do it. We got a nice slogan there.

If I was a marketing person, maybe I could make something of it. What else? Do it. That's important. What does it mean to do anything regularly? Daily.

That's probably the things that come to mind. You have to do it. You actually have to take your Bible off the nightstand and open it up and read it. And you have to do it every day. You also have to read it all the way.

[5:08] That's what it means to be regular about it. That you're systematic about it. That you're going to read the entire Bible. I'm a regular coffee drinker. And I drink my coffee every morning.

I drink, there's, every now and then there's a day I don't drink it. But that's rare. I drink my coffee every morning. I'm regular about it. And as the saying goes, it's good to the last drop.

And I drink it to the last drop. So, are we regular Bible readers? Do you read your Bible every day and all the way? That's what it means to be a regular Bible reader.

You read it all the day, or every day, all the way. If you're reading a sporadic, you read on a Tuesday, Friday night, Saturday evening, next Thursday.

I can tell you a few things about yourself. But probably the most important thing is, if your reading of the Bible is sporadic, then your love for God is cold.

[6:14] Your love for God is cold. Last week I said, the word of God is God breathed. And what we think of the Bible is what we think of God.

And if you don't love the Bible, and you don't pay attention to the Bible, you don't love God. And you're not paying attention to God. Does a wife who just listens to her husband every now and then, really love her husband?

Does a Christian really fervently love God if he only occasionally listens to him? The answer is no. If you don't read your Bible regularly, it shows that your love for God is not fervent love.

It's not hot love. And the only kind of love that God is worthy of is completely hot, fervent, excited love. Anything else is below him.

So brothers and sisters, if that's true, that God deserves our highest affections, then we all need to repent, don't we?

[7:21] Because we don't love God, and we don't love his word like we should, like he deserves.

So if you're not reading your Bible regularly, the thing to do is to repent, to confess to God, and tell him exactly what you're doing and how you feel about his word.

You confess what you are, and you turn away from what you're doing. You turn away from your sporadic reading of the Bible, and you pursue God once again.

If we're going to read our Bibles regularly, we have to do exactly that. Just like Lou said, we have to read it. We have to read it every day, all the way.

There's no shortcut. There's no royal road. There's no special way that you can read the Bible without reading the Bible. You have to pick up your Bible. You have to put your feet on the floor in the morning.

You have to take your Bible off the nightstand. You have to open it, and you have to read it. That's the only way you can read your Bible. And so if we're going to read, resolve to read the Bible regularly, we have to do it every day, and we have to do it all the way.

[8:37] Part of being regular in your Bible reading is you read the whole thing, your entire Bible. The whole Bible makes a whole Christian.

Every Christian needs every part of the Bible. So if you want to be a lopsided Christian, if you want to be a diminished Christian, if you want to be short-sighted, the plan is simple.

Here's what you do if you want to be that kind of Christian. You pick out your favorite parts, and you read them over and over again. And you never go to anything new. You just read that part over and over again.

And sooner or later, probably sooner, you're going to be a short-sighted, lopsided Christian. But if you want to be a whole Christian, if you want to be what a Christian is meant to be, then you need the whole Word of God.

Now that's going to take some planning. That's going to take some planning, because I don't think it's natural for us to go to the parts of the Bible that are more difficult, that are darker, that are harder to understand.

[9:44] But we need those parts. And so we need a plan. I kind of have a goal for my life. And the goal is, I want to go to every state in the United States.

That's my goal. I don't know why, but it is. And let me tell you, the odds of me actually doing this are almost zero. I'm probably not going to do it.

And you want to know why? Because I don't have a plan at all. I have no... It's true. I have no plan of how I'm going to do it. I sort of go where the wind takes me.

This week I'm going to North Carolina. I'm going to take the most direct route to get there. I'm not going to go out of my way to get Virginia under my belt. I'm going the fastest way.

And if I don't have a reason to go to Utah or to Maine, I'm just not going to go there. And so, I'm not going to make it to every state in the Union unless it's an accident.

[10:46] And that's how so many people read their Bibles. They sort of go where the wind takes them. They don't have any plan about it. We all need a plan.

We need, if we're going to be a whole Christian, we have to start somehow, we need to get from Genesis to Revelation. And we have to go everywhere in between. And if we're not, if we don't have a plan, then it's not going to happen the way it should.

And so, that's the first resolution. We resolve to read the Bible regularly. So, you might need to find a plan on the Internet.

You might need to make up your own plan. You might need to change your routine. But if you're going to read the Bible well, you have to read it regularly.

And that means every day and all the way. The second resolution is that we resolve to understand God's Word.

[11:48] We resolve to understand God's Word. J.C. Ryle says this, settle it down in your mind as a general principle that a Bible not understood is a Bible that does no good.

You don't understand it, it's not going to do you any good. So, how many people read their Bible every day and they don't understand it or they misunderstand it and they end up hanging themselves by the very rope that God threw to them to save them.

So, you have a Jehovah Witness and he reads his Bible every day and he reads and he reads and he doesn't understand what he reads and he brings his own ideas into the text and instead of saving him, the Word of God ends up damning him because he twists it to his own destruction.

He takes what is good and he uses it to destroy himself. That's exactly what Peter was talking about in 2 Peter. He's referring to Paul's writings and he says this about it, his letters contain some things that are hard to understand which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction.

They take Paul's writings and they distort it and then they destroy themselves. Peter knew it was true in his day.

[13:16] They could take the Word of God and use it to destroy themselves. People read it, they don't understand it, they misinterpret it and so they destroy themselves.

So, how important is it to understand what we're reading? We can read all day but if we don't understand what we're reading then it does us no good.

So, we're all theologians. Theologians don't live in seminaries and they don't work in colleges. They're us. They sit in churches.

We're all theologians. We're either good ones or we're bad ones. We either read the Bible well or we read it poorly. So, let's strive to be good theologians.

To understand the Word of God well. So, here's five things. Five quick things to understand the Bible better. And these aren't going to be complete by any stretch.

[14:21] The first is read the Bible prayerfully. Read the Bible prayerfully. Prayer expresses our humility in our need for God's help. We need help if we're going to understand God's Word.

Psalms 25, 9, He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble His way. So, let me ask you, do you pray before you read and you ask God for light?

How does God give us light? How does He teach us His way? That's for you. The Holy Spirit teaches us. Turn in your Bibles to John 16.

John 16. And look at verse 12. 16, verse 12. This is the night that our Lord was betrayed and He has all sorts of things to tell His disciples.

Verse 12. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.

[15:31] He will not speak on His own. He will speak only what He hears. And He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

And what belongs to the Father is mine. Or all that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said, the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. this is the foundation of

understanding the Bible.

The Holy Spirit must come and must teach us. The only alternative is that we get head knowledge. We read the Word of God and we get smarter.

But knowledge puffs up. And it doesn't, all the knowledge that we have, if it's not applied to our hearts, doesn't do us any good.

And the Holy Spirit knows how to take what we learn and what we read and stick it into our hearts. And that's what we need. He must open our eyes so that we can see how that particular truth that we're reading applies in my life right now.

[16:45] So if you want to understand the Bible, then pray for the Holy Spirit. The second way to understand the Bible is to read inquisitively.

Inquisitively. That means ask a lot of questions. Ask a lot of questions. If you, I have a four-year-old, and Eowyn asked me lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of questions.

And that's how we need to be with the Word of God. We come to it not knowing the answers, not already understanding everything. We need to ask questions.

So if you want to understand the Bible better, ask lots of questions. So let's say you're reading through the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Remember, Jesus told the parable that a man went out and he found some men and he hired them to work in the vineyard.

And he did this throughout the day, several times throughout the day. He took men from off the street and they went and worked in his vineyard. And then at the end of the day, it's time for the men to be paid. And he lines them up, the people that came in last and started with them and the people that worked all day and he ended with them and he paid them all the same.

[18:06] So we ask, what does that mean? That's a rather perplexing parable. But we know it's for us. We go and we understand that this word is meant to help us, to train us in righteousness.

And so we start asking questions. We ask, what's the context of this parable? Why is Jesus telling the parable? What's the point? How do the paragraphs fit together even?

Why does Jesus pay all the people the same? And Jesus at the end says, this is to show that the last will be first and the first will be last. How does the parable show us that?

And we ask questions. We ask lots of questions. And so you begin to answer these questions. And you begin looking for the answers.

And as you answer the questions, you understand the scriptures better. And so that tells me one thing. We can't be lazy when we're reading the word of God.

[19:11] If we're going to understand it, we have to work hard at it. A.W. Pink said, no verse of scripture yields its meaning to lazy people. No verse of scripture yields its meaning to lazy people.

If you want to understand the scripture, learn to ask questions and then learn to find the answers. The third way that we pursue understanding, that we understand scripture, is we do it relentlessly. Relentlessly. So we come to a passage in the word of God, and we're stumped. We don't know what to make of it.

And we read it, and we ask questions, and then there's a lot of unanswered questions. We can't come to understand it. We don't know what it has to do with us.

We're still in the dark. It's not time to give up yet, but it's a time to show some dogged determination. That you just keep working at it.

[20:13] Now, I believe there is a time, there are times when we come to the scriptures and we're not going to have a good answer. There's things that are unexplainable, and in those times, we have to learn to wait and put it on the back burner, so to speak, until we have further light.

But if you don't have the answer, you go and you keep working to find the answer, to understand the scriptures. So let me ask you, where can you find answers when you have questions that you can't explain?

Where are some places that we can go to? Dare. Ask you. What's that? Ask you. Ask me? That's not a good idea.

Yeah. How about ask the pastors? pastors? There you go. Yeah. You just had to say it like that, didn't you?

Our pastors are men who are trained and given to us by God to help us. And part of their ministry is to help the body understand the word of God.

[21:29] So pastors, Chuck, you had your hand? Commentaries. Yeah. There's lots and lots and lots of good commentaries out there. So use them.

If you have the money, buy a set. They can be invaluable. What else? Other scripture. That's really good. Yes. There's so many times in the word of God where we come to a passage that's dark. And then we can remember something like that being said somewhere else. And we interpret scripture with scripture and we understand both better.

Michael? Prayer. Right? Just asking God. And sometimes, isn't that amazing? Sometimes we read and read and we ask God and all of a sudden, the light bulbs turned on and we understand.

Mickey? Yeah. That's an excellent tool for finding other scriptures where we find a word here and we want to find out how the Bible uses it elsewhere.

[22:41] How about our church library? You know, we have an excellent library in there, really. And it's full of commentaries and it's full of books. That can help us.

And so, make use of those things. Make use of our pastors. Make use of commentaries. Make use of other books. It's going to help you understand the Bible better.

Proverbs 2, verse 3 says, may may may may may! silver and search for it as hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. So if we cry out and we keep calling out and we keep searching and we keep digging, God says that we will gain knowledge and we will gain wisdom. The fourth way that we understand scripture is when we read it thoughtfully, read it thoughtfully. And what I mean is to meditate on it. We meditate on it. So we read it and we reread it and we pray over it.

We ask it questions. We can even preach it to ourselves. Every man can be a preacher when he's sitting in his bedroom by himself and he could take the word of God and say, how does this apply to me? And start preaching it to yourself. John Newton had a practice, the author of Amazing Grace. Often when he was meditating on scriptures, he would take the word of God that he was reading on, reading and meditating on, and in his head, in his mind, he would start pretending like he was preaching it to himself. And as he preached it to himself and as he thought and thought more about it, light would come. He would understand it better just by dwelling on it more and applications would surface. How does this verse apply to me? It would come to light as he was preaching it to himself.

[24:48] Another way, and this is from Donald Whitney's book, The Spiritual Disciplines, you can say the passage that you're reading and emphasize different words as you read it. And this is very helpful.

So you're reading, let's say, John 3.16. And you say, for God so loved the world. And you say, for God so loved the world. And then, for God so loved the world. And each time, there's more meaning.

There's a slightly different meaning to the text as we emphasize each word. You can bring out, you can sort of parade your life before the text, as it were, is one good way to meditate on it. You can go through your day in your mind, and you say, what does this verse say about that? What does this verse say about how I eat breakfast? And what am I going to, how I talk to my wife? What does this verse say about my plan for today? What does this verse say about my finances and the decisions that I'm going to have to make? Whatever method you use to meditate, you need to meditate on the Word of God. There's no substitute for it. We can read Genesis to Revelation over and over again. But if you don't think about what you're reading, if it doesn't, if you don't let it dwell in you richly, then you're going to be the poorer for it. If you want to understand the Bible, fifthly, read it with Christ in view. Read it with Christ in view. Christ is the center of the Word of God.

The Word of God is the perfect reflection of Jesus Christ himself, who is the Word of God. He's the living Word. And so the written Word speaks of the living Word. And that's why from first to last, Jesus could say, you search the Scriptures because you think in them you'll find eternal life. And it's in those Scriptures that witness to me. They bear witness to me. So you have an Old Testament story before you.

And you have to think, what does Christ have to do with this Old Testament story? Is he prefigured here? Is there a picture of him here? Is he prophesied here? Is there a person here that looks a lot like Jesus in some ways? Is there a person in this story that looks nothing like Jesus? And so we compare what we read and we look at it in light of Jesus. And we come to understand the Scriptures better. So if Jesus is the absolute center of Scripture, if we miss him in all of our reading, then we've missed it all. We can step so close and yet miss the boat. So those five ways that we can read the Bible and understand it. If you're going to read the Bible well, you have to understand it because otherwise it does you no good. If you're going to have fellowship with Jesus, if you're

going to have fellowship with God the Father, with the Holy Spirit, you have to understand what you read. Our Father wants us to walk with him. Every day he wants us to get out of bed and walk with him. And the way we do that is by meditating on the Word of God.

If we leave our brains on our pillows, then we aren't walking with God. We're not pursuing him and loving him with all of our minds. Jonathan Edwards was 19 or 20 or so, and he made 70 resolutions for his life, for his spiritual life. Number 28 was this, resolved to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently as that I may find and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same. Why was Jonathan Edwards so great and so holy and so used by God? It was because he resolved that he was going to understand the Scriptures, that he was going to grow in his knowledge of the Scriptures, and he was going to do it so consistently, so persistently, that it was plain to him and it could be plain to everyone else that he was growing in his knowledge of the Word of God. And so is there anyone here who will resolve with Edwards and say, I'm going to meditate on the

Scriptures steadily, constantly, frequently, and so that it's plain to me and it can be plain to everyone else that I am growing in the knowledge of the Word of God. That brings us to our third resolution to read the Bible better. In the third resolution, we resolve to obey what we read. We resolve to obey what we read. Psalm 32:9 says, and this is God speaking, I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule which has no understanding, but must be controlled by bit and bridle, or they will not come to you. So God is asking us to do something. He's saying, don't be like a horse or a mule that you have to force to obey you.

The whole point of reading the Scriptures is to bring our life into conformity to it. And so if that is what we need to be doing, then we have to pre-commit to obey whatever it says. So we don't act like a horse that needs to be forced to do what it needs to do. We obey it. And we obey it, sensing that God is telling us what to do. So we come to it like Samuel. He's in the quiet of the temple and he said, speak, your servant is listening. And that's what the attitude we need to have when we come to the Word of God. We're not the master. I'm not the master of this book. It's the master of me. And so when I come to it, I say, speak, your servant is listening. It's a very freeing thing to be a servant. And it's free to not have to worry about the whys and the what-fors and the who's and all those things. We hear the Word of God and we say, okay, I'm going to obey that. I'm not going to argue. I'm going to obey with all my heart. So if he tells me something I don't understand in the Word of God, if he tells me to do something that just doesn't make sense to me, it's okay. Because I'm the servant and he's the master.

And so if we don't have that relationship correct, if the Word of God is not over me instead of me over it or the other, if we're always trying to skirt God's authority and say, well, I don't think he really meant exactly that. I think, you know, it's probably okay what I'm doing. I, you know, I don't really want to obey in that area. If we have that relationship where we're always deciding what we're going to obey, then we are twisting God's Word and we're going to destroy ourselves.

[32:46] When we come to the Word of God, we come to a pharmacist, as it were. If you go to the pharmacist, if you want to be smart, you look at what he tells you to do and you do it. And a foolish person looks at what he tells you to do and then does something different. A couple of months ago, I got sick and I went to the doctor and the doctor prescribed the medicine and it said, take twice a day for 10 days.

So I took twice a day for six days and I was like, well, I'm better. So I quit taking it. A couple of weeks later, I have the same problem that I had before. So I take a couple of pills and it didn't work. A couple of weeks later, I'm still sick in the same way. So I go back to the doctor and he gives me the medicine and says, take twice a day for 10 days. So I go, okay, I'm going to do it this time. So I take it twice a day for 10 days. And lo and behold, I'm better.

And I didn't get sick again. And that's what we need to have, the attitude that we need to have with the Word of God. If we obey what it says, then we will be healed. If we half-heartedly obey, if we just six out of 10 times obey, if we mostly obey, then we're not going to be better off for it.

Because the areas that God wants to change in our life are going to go unchanged. Because I have my pet sins and my little treasures in my heart that if I don't give up and if I don't seek to obey in those areas, then I'm going to remain unchanged. So that's the third resolution. Resolve to obey what you read.

The fourth resolution is this. This is the final one. Resolve to watch over your Bible reading. We talked about this in prayer, and this is just as important in reading your Bible. You watch over your Bible reading. If the Bible is worth reading, it's worth reading well. And if it's worth reading well, it's worth protecting and guarding. So here's a wife, and she's a jealous wife. She's jealous for her husband. Not in a bad way, in a good way. She loves her husband. And she starts noticing that another woman's sort of kind of getting in there. And she's making eyes at her husband. And she's a little too giggly, a little too charming around her husband. What does the jealous wife do?

[35 : 31] Well, she puts an end of that right now, doesn't she? She puts her foot down. She confronts the woman. She takes away her husband. Nothing and no one is going to come between a wife, a jealous wife, and her man. And that kind of jealousy is good. It's good to have in a marriage. And it's good to have in your Bible reading. Where you say, nothing is coming between me and my Bible reading.

Nothing is coming between it. And if things begin to interfere, some things start creeping in and start getting in the way of you and your Bible, that holy jealousy is going to be angry. There's going to be a holy anger for the things that are getting in the way. And it's not sinful. But you say, if the TV is getting in the way between me and my, and the Word of God, if the internet is, then those things have to go. It can't last. They have to go. You put your foot down. Enough is enough. Reading the Bible is too important to just let a thousand other things creep in. And so you shove out all the nonsense.

And you say, this is it. This is my Bible and me. And nothing's coming between us. So if you're going to be watching over your Bible reading, you have to be jealous about it. And you also have to make it a priority. You give it your best time, not the sleepy scraps of time at the end of the day. And I'm not making any rules for you. But in my humble opinion, the morning is the time to be reading your Bible.

And there's nothing wrong with reading your Bible and praying at the end of the day. That's good. But there's two reasons why that shouldn't be your only time. And I'm going to tell you the two reasons.

And they're not mine. They're Donald Whitney's. He says, first of all, you're not going to remember most of what you read if you read and then fall asleep.

[37 : 49] It's just the truth. You're not going to remember what you read. And the second thing is, if you're anything like me, you probably don't do a whole lot of evil while you sleep.

Most of our life is when we're awake. We need our bath before we meet people. We need the Word of God before we meet people. It's in the daytime. It's my life that I'm going to be confronted with temptation and with trials. And I have to have the Word of God fresh in my heart and in my mind, or it doesn't do me any good. So if you want to read the Bible well, resolve to watch your Bible reading.

Protect it like a jealous wife. And make it a priority. And you will be blessed. So those are the four resolutions. Read the Bible regularly. Read it to understand. Read it to obey.

And watch over your Bible reading. I have just a few questions to conclude. What's going to keep Grace Fellowship Church growing and continuing to reform and be improved?

What's going to keep our pastors from falling into false teaching? What can make you holy? What can make you keep growing?

[39 : 16] How do you know and commune with Jesus? How can you find strength for facing Monday morning and Tuesday morning and every morning after that?

What can make your families holy? What can help you pray better? The answer to all those questions is by reading and believing and obeying your Bible.

And so I ask, will you read your Bible more? And will you read it well? Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Word of God.

Will you forgive us for neglecting it? Will you forgive us for not loving it? Forgive us for being lazy. So lazy. And so in love with other things.

When you've given us such a precious gift. Will you help us to cherish our Bibles. To read them well. Will you be with us as we worship you now.

[40 : 20] We pray that you would break the bread of life to us. Will you break the Word of God to us. Will you help us to see Jesus. And help us to love him more.

And I pray these things in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen. Amen.